

Chancellor's Community Forum

A New Approach to Student Discipline

January 28, 2009

Sousa Middle School

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Discussion Leader: Barbara Adderley

Overview: Several attendees wanted clarity regarding how the new tier system was developed and how exactly it would impact the students. Many community members wanted to ensure that the discipline policy was equitable and that students across the city were treated justly.

Several of the individuals who were employees or teachers within DCPS were appreciative of the new plan but were concerned about whether the policy would be implemented thoroughly and with fidelity. Instructional Superintendent Chad Ferguson addressed issues such as the need for teachers and administrators to be thoroughly trained on the new policy, along with the need for parents to be educated about the process so that all stakeholders will be collectively accountable for the enforcement of the new policy.

Of the numerous assertions made by community members, there were thoughtful suggestions of activities that could be used to increase awareness of the new policy as well as concerns about how the data developed by the new accountability system would be accessed, tracked and reviewed.

The instructional superintendents were able to address many of the issues raised by the attendees. Attendees were troubled about issues ranging from the lack of policy enforcement and inconsistency associated with following protocols in the past, to the lack of input and authority parents/guardians have in challenging disciplinary actions. In response, the instructional superintendent discussion leaders were willing to offer their immediate and direct support by offering personal follow up contact information. Many expressed appreciation regarding her initiatives to include the community and her willingness to improve the environment in which our students live and learn.

Keywords: intervention strategies, conflict resolution, suspension, remediation, flexibility, consistency, equity, security

Presenter/ Moderator: Chad Ferguson, Deputy Chief of Youth Engagement & Instructional Superintendent - Cluster VI

Codes

GP: Gerren Price

CF: Chad Ferguson, Deputy Chief of Youth Engagement & Instructional Superintendent Cluster VI

MR: Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

BA: Barbara Adderley, Instructional Superintendent, Cluster I

CM: Community Member

Attendance:

4 Teachers
4 Parents
4 Community Advocates
8 Other school Staff
1 Student

Notes:

MR: We brought together stakeholders to be on a task force to address our student discipline policy. The task force had two overarching objectives:

1. Needed clarity of expectations
2. **Consistency** of implementation

Under the proposed policy, we are maximizing instructional time. We don't want to have a system where kids with challenged behavior are out of school for extended periods of time.

GP: The outline for tonight is that we will start with a presentation by Chad Ferguson and then break out into discussion groups with leaders to get your thoughts on the proposed revisions.

CF: This forum is for the community. The more input we have on the proposed policy, the better our policy will be. We want to create a school culture that is inviting and safe. We also want the policy to be more user-friendly and have community input.

We compiled all the behaviors we see in schools and addressed each individual action. We are taking an instructional approach where we sit down with the student and discuss how we can resolve the issue rather than immediately removing them from the classroom. The reality of being in a school is that there are behaviors that warrant student being removed. However, we want to ensure that students are safe and ready to learn.

We grouped student behaviors into tiers with the least serious actions to the most severe. Many of the actions, the teacher can address the behavior immediately. Consequences become more severe and prescriptive with more severe student behavior. Tiers 1, 2 & 3 of consequences all require effective conversation

We will develop a staff of people that understand how to work effectively with students and best use the policy to promote instructional time and prevent major student behavior.

Discussion Group:

CM: We have both policies – the old one and the proposed policy. *Are the tiers in both policies aligned?*

CM: Chapter 25 is the foundation for schools to create discipline policy. *Are schools to create their own policy? How do we know when the DC Council approves policies, so that schools can begin to implement them?*

CM: There is no common sense in the document. Once you get input, *are you going to take and pull from this document? How do you balance the consequences based on the socioeconomic circumstances from different regions of the city?* I have documentation from the legal department saying, “Parents don’t have common sense.” I don’t trust you. You have to keep in mind what messages are received by the community based on what policies you implement.

BA: It is not you all, it is WE. We are working toward the same cause - We want all children to succeed. There has been collaboration in making this policy.

CF: We took every behavior that we could think of and laid them out from least to most severe. We determined what behaviors are placed in which tier based on input from the Drafting Committee and conversations here, at the forums.

There is a different feel in every school and we try to set common expectations, but still give them a little **flexibility**.

CM: *How are behaviors placed into each tier?*

CF: Tier I does not harm anyone.

CM: Schools should have a back-to-school night where parents and students can come to discuss disciplinary issues. It also shows that parents and teachers are a team. I am in constant contact with parents and the kids know that. Because I am always talking to parents, the students will be better behaved. We need more parental meetings, prizes for parents coming in. We need to make away for parents to understand the plan

CM: I wish I saw parents in my school; they don’t come to the school as often as the children age. For example in Tiers 1,2, and 3, when students are suspended because of repetitive negative behaviors, parents progressively have more antipathy toward the teacher and principals.

CF: The mechanism we have built into the proposed policy is progressive in severity for repeating offenses.

CM: *Will schools actually hire someone to directly address and be directly responsible for in-school **suspension**?* Students respond to in-school suspension.

CF: Yes, hiring people for in-school **suspension** will take time and money. It's not something we can do across the board right now but we hope in a few years to be away from out of school suspensions.

CM: If we enact this policy next year we won't have the people in place.

CF: We will be working with superintendents to work on this.

BA: As a teacher and a principal, sending students home does not work. We have to teach children how to act appropriately. Yesterday I was in a school and asked a teacher if I could teach a lesson. One boy shouted out the "N" word. I said that was not acceptable. Afterwards he apologized.

CM: I think the proposed revisions are vague. There should be less autonomy. The discipline committee should have a conference where they address the student. If you have a group of people collectively addressing the student, it would strengthen the impact of discipline. At first it takes away time but in time it will be worthwhile.

MR: There is a need for **consistency** from one school to another. I don't want to see different consequences for the same behavior. The policy has to be balanced with the fact that there will be exceptions. We can ensure **consistency** but keeping **flexibility** is one way that we can ensure that the right balance is met. There needs to be some **flexibility** in consequences for a parent whose child is an honor roll, stellar student who brought a weapon to school.

CM: I have four children. I don't think that because my child is an honor roll student that he should receive an exception to being disciplined.

CM: *Who is going to ensure equity for the child?* There is **consistency** in the schools but there has to be **flexibility** of consequences. There are children who are acting out and due to the circumstance there has to be some balance with consequences for these behaviors.

CM: I want to congratulate the chancellor at taking a better look at the circumstances. I work with conflict resolution to have children learn from these incidents and encouraging the use of **intervention strategies**. What I would do is emphasize the **remediation** and **intervention strategies**. For tier 1 and 2, there should be required **conflict resolution**. We need resources in order to have teachers be able to learn how to implement these **interventions**. Prevention - teaching students before things go wrong on how to deal with issues and an extra emphasis on communication cross/multicultural understanding will create the environment where teachers can effectively teach.

CM: I fail to understand how these changes are different from the current policy. When I started attending the meetings, I heard that we were going away from suspensions. It looks like we are trying to address behaviors; we can't change children without changing the environment. **Suspension** compromises the potential to have a wholesome dynamic environment for students. You can't manage behavior if the child is not in school. We should look at resource management systems. We are wasting money trying to contain problems. CHOICE and Luke C. Moore are places where children are sent to "get them out of someone's hair." I am tired, as a taxpayer, of seeing children pushed around the system. *When are we going to harness the money we have to make a dynamic **conflict resolution**?* I'm afraid we are not utilizing money effectively

BA: This is where we are headed; we cannot make the changes if the students are not in school. You have all made great suggestions.

CM: One problem is that there all this pretty stuff in writing, but people don't know the rules. *What good is the new policy if the principal doesn't know the rules?* Ron Brown is sending kids straight to Mt. Olivet Road. They are now in the penal system - for a tussle in the cafeteria. I want to know when the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) will no longer be in charge of **security**. *When is this going to change? This year? Students are being sent to YSC without having parents notified?*

CM: Mandating some sort of incentive where parents and kids can learn the policy together. A lot of Latinos cannot read the literature. Information isn't being sent in the language of the parents. They sign and send it back

BA: That is not true – everything that comes through my office is sent home in the home language.

CM: A child harmed another child and received ISS. Of all the suggestions, the most important is for us to implement a better way to communicate with parents. I know it's hard to get parents into the school.

CM: I heard that students were not a part of the standing committee. Students want input and feel strongly about being part of the final process. The documents that track these behaviors - *will they be used to hurt or help the students?* I thought DC had a Student Council board. I think high school students are really insightful and have a lot to offer to this process.

CM: In regard to this policy, *what follows our children?* This is a formal record that follows them. We have to be clear in what goes into these records especially when children want to aspire to higher levels in the future. Each cluster should have representatives. We have to be aware of how these records are following our children from school to school

CM: We should call a roundtable where students are reminded to be effective and independent learners. First we listen to the children, then we talk with parents and teachers and come up with a plan to address the behaviors. After that we look at how things change once everyone is on the same page. The student has to call home to “confess thy sins” where children call the parent in front of the principal. You have to build communication in your school so that children trust you enough to talk with an adult.

CM: There is no law written to ensure that parent can contest these rules.

CM: One way to remedy the issues in schools is to have students be a part of the actual process.

CM: Let high school students review this proposal so that they may give their input.

CM: Instead of mailing information home to parents, there should be built-in events where parents can express their views, give feedback, and ask questions.